

CAULIFLOWER

At the Farmers Market yesterday
amongst the leaves and grasses
of basil, cilantro, asparagus,
avocados, tomatoes, onions,
red, yellow, and white, across
from the Mexican woman singing
fiesta and not far from the
saxophonist crooning Bird, I saw
the most beautiful cauliflower
I'd ever seen, huge, the size of
a dinner plate, the face of a
Rabbit moon, taking two hands
to hold it, two handfuls of
thirsty water. But we don't
care much for the taste of
cauliflower so I didn't buy it,
a bargain for two dollars, and
went on to buy garlic and eggs,
but later, I still thought about
that cauliflower, the bright dunes
and lacy crevices of it, how beautiful
it would look in a bowl like a bouquet,
uneaten, while it told our future,
read our maps to the gold of our
souls, but when I went back to
buy it, the cauliflower was gone,
off to another family's home to be
steamed, eaten, and add 20 years
to their lives. And I suppose
it was good that I did not buy the
cauliflower. I am too ordinary
for such power.

Greer Garson, the late great actress, once said, "A good marriage is a blessing." Other Gifts from the Relationship Gods should surely include concerned compatibility with one's parents, siblings, and offspring. And, if one is a very fortunate poet, with one's editor.

My first blessing from Marvin Malone occurred in 1975

when, upon Charles Bukowski's advice that the WORMWOOD REVIEW was the best U.S. poetry mag ("barring none") and manned by the best "no bullshit editor," I sent off my first poems. And, sans folderol, Marvin Malone accepted them all: five. Luck? No. I didn't know it then in 1975 that I'd found my voice right off the bat, that unusual "new" voice Marvin Malone was always looking for. I was writing about something that, at the time, no one else was: my days as a go-go girl. Subsequent attendance (1977-79) at a prestigious university for a Master of Fine Arts degree in fiction writing would change all that. There, my first-person memoir style now in vogue was disdained by the academics, my subject matter deigned "tawdry" by a visiting workshop prof, a cofounder of the PARIS REVIEW. Shamed by them for my "confessional" writing mode, I floundered for many years writing odd-sounding novels, and avoided the pennilessness of writing poetry.

Until my mother died, in 1986, and suddenly my "voice" returned. And I was re-blessed. Marvin Malone accepted ten poems, many about my dying mother. And it seemed as if I'd returned to the Cradle of Civilization. If not for Marvin Malone—and Charles Bukowski, then, and later my poet husband, Fred Voss—I don't know what kind of poet I would've become. Or if I even would've become one. But for sure my poems about my scandalous past would've been abandoned. Perhaps, too, the loving poems about my extraordinary father and mother. And my "movie star" poems. And my "cooking" poems. I might've kept trying to emulate Sylvia Plath's hate-Daddy-and-Mommy ways. Strained to write lofty mysticism à la Ashbery and Charles Wright. Or Dickinson virtue. Or Hughes's ewes, Bly's awe of sequoias and twisted junipers. As he did the likes of Gerald Locklin, Lyn Lifshin, Phil Weidman, Ann Menebroker, Charles Bukowski, Fred Voss, Dan Lenihan, Billy Collins, Billy Jones, Charles Webb, Edward Field, Ray Zepeda, Catherine Lynn et al., Marvin Malone let me be Myself, even if it did include an occasional "nature" poem (there's not much "nature" in the cities and suburbias where I've lived), the *last* poem of mine he accepted, called "Cauliflower."

And I had the extremely wonderful pleasure-honor to be able to talk to him about that poem, face to face, at lunch the last time I'd ever see him (having met him for the first time the day before—April 20, 1995—when he read at California State University, Long Beach). Ray Zepeda, my husband Fred, and I dined with him at the Blue Cafe, the epicenter on Fridays of the

downtown Long Beach Farmers Market where my cauliflower poem was inspired a month before. Marvin Malone and I talked about cauliflower per se, how in my poem the cauliflower, because I had wanted to make an objet d'art of it rather than eat it, could not have fulfilled its purpose in life. "Raison d'être," I tossed into the conversation, always glad for a chance to speak French. The Subject, my god, was *Cauliflower* with this Learned Man. "Exactly," he said, "raison d'être." Enough said.

This scholar, gentleman, and scientist, this admired editor-publisher and poet and artist, had not only read my cauliflower poem top to bottom and accepted it for publication in his also-admired magazine, but he had actually given great thought to it, even more than I, merely its writer, had. And it will never again, for me as a poet, be as good as that.

Our lunch arrived and we ate. Marvin Malone pushed through his pasta with his fork, looked at me, smiled, and said, "Just checking for cauliflower."

—Joan Jobe Smith

Long Beach, CA

A PORTRAIT OF THE EDITOR AS A ROCK

There was this rock, sticking up out of the ocean. It had been there forever. Sometimes the waves were choppy and other times the sea was calm—it made no difference to the rock. It was rock steady. All kinds of little creatures clung to the rock under the water line: crabs, starfish, anemones, coral—all beautiful and harmless. It was a great rock, and they were happy just being there. A few of the bigger crabs climbed up on top and basked in the sunshine. Years went by but the waves didn't wear it down any. It was a hell of a rock.

That's the image that comes to mind when I think of the late Marvin Malone, editor of the long-lived, highly respected little magazine the WORMWOOD REVIEW. The man was an institution, and his mag was (and remains) a monument.

Malone put out WORMWOOD steadily from the early 1960s until his recent death: 144 issues, counting the last regular issue completed by his daughter Christa. A remarkable run for a small press magazine. He knew what he liked, and he knew what was